NEVADA Connec+ions

No adult left behind

Consistent with the focus on leaving no child behind, there is an increased interest in what works for teaching adults to read. According to renowned education researcher Judith Alamprese, this is due to several factors: The challenges presented by adult students entering with a wide range of reading skills; practitioners' desire to learn more about effective instructional methods; and, due to a heightened emphasis on accountability, the need to develop reasonable performance measures for first-level learners. This issue of Nevada Connections highlights information gleaned from the National Reading Panel, describes emerging research on adults, and provides some resources that teachers and tutors can access now to move from research to practice. Special thanks to NAEPDC and to the excellent resources noted in this issue for their work and dissemination efforts!

National Reading Panel Report

The National Reading Panel (NRP) issued a report in 2000 that reflected a review of reading research for children and identified five key areas of instruction—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The NRP offered instructional guidance based on its "scientifically-based reading research" reflecting only studies that featured quantitative measures of effects. (Qualitative research, descriptive studies, or work that did not yield a statistical effect were not included.)

Although some literacy scholars have criticized some of the Panel's methods, and although some might question the transference of conclusions from children to adults, the NRP report provides a useful perspective for understanding key issues in reading instruction. According to Alamprese, "The implications of the Panel's report for teaching adults are that direct instruction on these topics may be beneficial to first-level adult learners, and that teachers must understand adults' relative strengths in these areas prior to beginning instruction." This conclusion is also born out by a synthesis of adult reading research (Venezky et al, 1998).

Five key areas

The paper *Scientifically-Based Reading Research: A Primer for Adult and Family Literacy Educators*, written by Padak, Rasinski, and Mraz and published by the Ohio Literacy Resource Center (OLRC, September 2002), provides an excellent description of the five areas identified by the National Reading Panel:

Phonemic Awareness is the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words. Phonemic awareness is not the same as phonics, which involves understanding how *written* letters relate to specific sounds. Phonemic awareness focuses on how the sounds of *spoken* language are put together to form *spoken* words. Before someone can learn to read printed letters and words, he or she needs to understand that words are made up of different speech sounds, or phonemes. A phoneme is the smallest part of sound in a spoken word that makes a difference in the word's meaning. For example, changing the first phoneme in the word *ball* from /b/ to /k/, changes ball to call. Changing the beginning phoneme changes the meaning of the word.

The NRP found that instruction improves children's phonemic awareness, reading, and spelling capabilities, and many education experts believe that adults at Level I (and perhaps Level 2) may benefit from phonemic awareness training. *Continued on Page 2*

Phonics helps readers learn the relationships between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language. Phonics instruction is most effective if begun in K-1 for children and at Levels 1 and 2 for adults. Effective phonics programs are systematic, explicit, and provide ample opportunities for students to apply what they are learning to real reading. The NRP explains that systematic phonics instruction is more effective than incidental phonics instruction.

Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately and quickly. Fluency is necessary for reading comprehension. A reader who struggles with words tends to read at a very slow rate and with monotone inflection. The reader is so focused on pronouncing individual words that he or she is not able to think about meaning. Fluent readers recognize most words rapidly and accurately, and, therefore, can focus their attention on making sense of the text.

Vocabulary includes both oral (speaking and listening) and written (reading and writing). Vocabulary knowledge is important for successful reading and necessary for comprehension. The larger a person's vocabulary, the easier it is to comprehend. It is not enough to merely memorize definitions of words. A reader needs to develop a deeper knowledge of words in order to quickly access word meanings when reading.

Comprehension is purposeful and active. Comprehension strategies can be taught through explicit instruction, cooperative learning, and helping students learn to use strategies flexibly and in combination. The NRP advises teaching comprehension by demonstrating how to use reasoning skills and problem-solving strategies. Comprehension occurs before, during, and after reading.

Phonemic awareness and phonics instruction is most appropriate for beginning readers, while adults at all levels can likely benefit from focusing on fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. There are many resources available to help. For example, the Eureka! database at www.literacy.kent.edu/eureka provides many instructional strategies.

For a full copy of the OLRC report, which contains more information on each of these areas and pointers to other resources (including the downloadable *A Handbook of Effective Literacy Instruction* by Rasinski & Padak, 1995), visit http://literacy.kent.edu/, click on OLRC Publications (under Literacy Resources on the left), then click on "Research to Practice" and select the document *Scientifically-Based Reading Research: A Primer for Adult and Family Literacy Educators*.

To find resources available through Nevada's SLRC:
1. Go to www.clan.lib.nv.us
2. Click on "search" (upper right)
3. Click on "advanced" (slightly to the left)
4. Use the arrow key in the first "find" box to change it to "subject"
5. Enter your topic (for example, comprehension) in the "find" box.
6. Scroll the list of libraries and highlight Nevada Literacy Coalition
7. Click on "perform search" (bottom of page)

You may also search using ERIC descriptors. Examples: A search for communication skills and phonics yields 10 resources. A search for high school equivalency and reading yields 45 titles.

Contact Susan Graf, sfgraf@clan.lib.nv.us, 800/445-9673, for more information and help with finding the resources you need.

American Institutes for Research findings

The "What Works for Adult ESL Literacy Students" study, conducted by the American Institutes for Research October 1999 through August 2001, looked at 495 students in seven states. The study found that students in classes where teachers made connections to the "outside" or real world had more growth in basic reading skills and that students in classes where teachers used students' native language as an aid to instruction had faster growth in basic reading comprehension. The study also found that there were relationships between growth and several class and student variables (e.g., class schedules, attendance, students' abilities upon entry). For more information contact Larry Condelli, LCondelli@air.org.

Emerging research on adult reading

Judith Alamprese, Prinicipal Associate at Abt Associates, is heading up a study of reading instruction for first-level learners that is focused on two critical questions:

- How much do first-level adult learners who participate in ABE programs improve their reading skills and reading-related behaviors after participation?
- How are adults' personal characteristics, as well as the operational and instructional characteristics of ABE programs, related to the amount of improvement in reading skills or reading-related behaviors among first-level learners?

> You may access *Focus on Basics* from http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/ (click on publications).

In an article in the August 2001 issue of *Focus on Basics*, Judy shared some findings from the initial analysis of five ABE programs. "The instructional methods used by teachers in the first group of programs in this study are consistent with the research reported by the National Reading Panel and the synthesis of reading produced by Venezky and colleagues. Since the data collection is not yet complete, an analysis of the relationship between these methods and learners' capacity to improve their reading skills is not yet available."

The final report is expected to be released in Spring 2003.

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

NCSALL's Adult Reading Component Study (ARCS) began in 1996 and is scheduled for completion in 2006. The researchers are John Strucker and Rosalind Davidson, both from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. This effort is the first large-scale attempt to describe the reading of students enrolled in ABE and ESOL using a battery of individually administered reading and language tests. An Occasional Paper (*How the ARCS was Done*) detailing the methodology of the study is available now at http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/research/occas.htm.

> NCSALL is developing teaching materials on reading and a Reading Study Circle Guide. Expected distribution: May 2003.

Davidson and Strucker have published a 2-page Research Brief, *Patterns Of Word Recognition Errors Among ABE Native And Nonnative Speakers Of English*, that summarizes some findings from their work at the Harvard Adult Reading Laboratory. For example, they found that:

- Highly similar scores on decoding tests do not necessarily mean people use similar decoding strategies.
- As readers, the nonnative English speakers more closely resemble normally developing younger readers, whereas the native English speakers more closely resemble children with learning disabilities.

The Brief is available at http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/research/repbriefs.htm.

Nevada's work

Here in Nevada, on an admittedly smaller but very pragmatic scale, Sue Bettles (bettles@gbcnv.edu) will be measuring learning gains for students participating in a special "critical reading for comprehension" project. Sue's endeavor focuses on teaching comprehensive and higher level thinking skills to pre-GED students. Her results will be available later in this academic year.

Do your practices reflect the research? Check them out!

The Partnership for Reading, will be publishing a compilation of the existing research in a booklet entitled *Adult Education Reading Instruction*. The web version can be found now at http://www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/.

The Web site presents evidenced-based practices for teaching reading to adults in ABE and family literacy programs. The practices are divided into the following categories: reading assessment profiles, alphabetics (which includes phonemic awareness and phonics instruction), fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and computer technology.

Under each of the categories, users may select assessment practices, instructional practices, or ideas from K-12 research. For example, choose vocabulary, then instructional practices, then goals and setting and you'll find that "Initial research suggests that teaching vocabulary in a specific setting, such as a family literacy or workplace setting, may be more effective than teaching vocabulary in a more general setting." There is a link to the research supporting this statement.

Connecting resources for Nevada's adult workforce

Free training available to all adult educators in Nevada

The following free workshops are offered through ABE leadership funds and are available to all adult educators in Nevada on a space available base. Several recent workshops have been filled, so be sure to contact the appropriate host to reserve a seat. General information: Rachael Dilling, 702/363-2728, www.girafix1@yahoo.com.

Title/date/place	Host (contact)	Presenter and objectives
ESL 101 Part I 1/11/03 Sparks	Vicki Newell Northern Nevada Literacy Coalition 775/356-1007 director@nnlc.org	Maxine Frauman-Prickel. Define the basic elements that contribute to language acquisition. Identify classroom strategies for developing listening and speaking skills in adult ESL students. Describe cooperative-learning structures that foster language acquisition.
Cooperative Learning 1/25/03 Las Vegas	Lyn Pizor Catholic Charities 702/693-6761 lynpizor@yahoo.com	Sally Scott. Learn the difference between cooperative learning and group working. Understand the rationale for using cooperative learning. Integrate cooperative learning into lesson plans.
ESL 101 Part I 2/7/03, Las Vegas	CCSN See contact information for 2/8/03 below.	See description for 1/11/03 above.
ESL 101 Part II 2/8/03 Las Vegas	CCSN (8-5): Sheila Fairbairn 702/651-4896 sheila_Fairbairn@ccsn.nevada.edu (Noon-9): Judy Barron 702/651-4266 judy_barron@ccsn.nevada.edu	Maxine Frauman-Prickel. Define the basic elements that contribute to language acquisition. Identify classroom strategies for developing reading and writing skills for beginning and intermediate adult ESL students. Describe cooperative learning structures that foster reading and writing in a second language.

**NOTE: IN ORDER TO REGISTER FOR ESL PART II, YOU MUST HAVE
COMPLETED THE FOLLOW-UP WORK FOR PART I AND SUBMITTED IT TO RACHAEL DILLING**

Title/date/place	Host (contact)	Presenter and objectives
Learning Disabilities 2/22/03, Fallon	Suzanne Graves Lahontan Val. Lit. Vol. 775/423-8583 lvlit@churchillcounty.org	Lyn Pizor. To understand the causes of LD. To learn and practice strategies for working with LD students.
Critical Thinking 2/22/03 Sparks	Vicki Newell Northern Nevada Literacy Coalition 775/356-1007 director@nnlc.org	Don Prickel. Identify factors that shape an individual's thinking (e.g. culture, gender, and experiences). Define, understand, and develop metacognitive strategies that assist in self-directed thinking and learning. Facilitate learners towards more critical and analytical thinking through instructional strategies.